

## No-One Knows I'm Gay - By Darren Elliott

Sexual orientation is a private issue that should make little or no difference to one's relationships and interactions. What difference does it make to my friends who my lover is? It has no impact on them; it is none of their concern. This year I have chosen to be very public about my sexual orientation to encourage those closeted individuals who are needlessly suffering. Otherwise, only my closest friends would be the wiser. Hopefully my "straight" friends will be secure enough to deal with this choice of public outness and understand my reasons for doing so.

There are many myths regarding sexual orientation that I will be dealing with in my articles. Many people are uneasy about things they don't understand. I hope that by reading my articles people will attain a better understanding about what it means for a person to have a different sexual orientation than their own. I hope to break some common misconceptions and stereotypes often attributed to gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. As people, we are a lot more alike than we are different. We are all in this life together and should be sharing common goals.

Myth #1: "If I have a gay friend, people will think that I'm gay too."

Fact: All of my straight friends have at least one gay friend, me. Having me as a friend has no impact on their sexual identities whatsoever. To my knowledge, none of them have ever had their sexuality questioned because of being my friend. You don't have to prove your sexuality to anyone. You are no better and no worse than anyone else based on your sexual orientation. Friendship has nothing to do with sexuality anyway. Chances are that you have a number of gay friends without knowing it. None of my family or friends knew I was gay before I came out to them. I saw some pretty shocked faces when I first came out, but I didn't lose any friendships over it. In

fact, I felt a lot closer to a number of people because I finally was able to share openly with them. I no longer had to make cover up lies and to be on the guard to hide any possible clues that could cause them to see through the facade.

Many people feel pressured to keep their sexuality completely suppressed because they are not prepared to face so many of the misconceptions and false ideas many people express around them. Such hiding can lead to feelings of low self worth, misery, and even suicide attempts. There is no justification for anyone to feel this way. If you feel this way I sincerely hope you will seek help.

I was born on February 11, 1994. A little late perhaps, but the timing was perfect. O.K., I wasn't really born, but that was the day I feel my life truly began. Before that day, I wasn't really living—at least not as myself. I was pretending to be who I thought I was supposed to be— who my parents and friends thought they wanted me to be. They were wrong. They didn't really want me to be someone I'm not. Now they realize that they want me to be who I am— they want me to be happy.

This revelation did not come to them easily, it had to come to me first. My parents didn't think I could possibly be happy as a gay man— my Dad still thinks that I am forgoing career opportunities and happiness as a result of living as myself. I know that he is wrong— I have found so much happiness inside myself now that I am open and honest, I can't imagine living totally closeted ever again.

When I was closeted I had many irrational beliefs. I kept all my relationships at a distance because I thought that people would reject me if they knew my "deep dark secret". My deeply embedded Christian beliefs had me convinced that I was evil and vile. I truly hated myself. I had walls up around me so people couldn't see who I really was. I spent a lot of energy making sure that people couldn't tell I was often depressed, upset, unable to sleep. Luckily I am a very positive person so I was

often able to keep myself 'up' by writing encouraging poems and songs and forcing myself to believe their words. Despite these efforts, on more than one occasion my self hatred led to actions that could have made me a statistic.

In the months leading up to my public coming out experience my irrational beliefs changed radically. I came to realize that being gay doesn't define me as a person, it is simply a part of who I am. I am friendly, honest, 6'1", creative, adventuresome, musical, and gay. I no longer have any shame about my sexuality. When I came out to people I expected acceptance; I found that people tend to do what is expected of them. Had I felt ashamed, they would have assumed I had something to feel ashamed about and I certainly don't. I always try to make decisions I can be proud of later—a helpful guide to follow.

When people found out about my sexuality I felt like light had finally reached into my soul where I use to conceal my deep dark secret. Once it was in the light it was no longer dark. Ever since that day I have been true to myself.

If you are struggling with closeted life there are alternatives. If you're miserable make sure you get some kind of help. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

## Pride, A Deeper Love . . . by J.

These days, one can't turn on the television, read the newspaper or just go out in the world without coming across issues related to homosexuality. 1994 began with a bang as gays, lesbians and bisexuals took to the streets in celebration of their lives and to fight for their rights.

As a prelude to the events of this year, early Spring began with thousands of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and supporters celebrating Pride Week/Day across North America through parades, peaceful demonstrations, parties, etc. This led to Stonewall 25, celebrating the Stonewall riots of 1969 in which homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites and supporters fought back against the fear, discrimination and homophobia that had been, and still is, affecting them. Then came the Gay Games '94, which brought to attention the achievements of our homosexual/bisexual athletes. As a sobering finale, the creating and defeat of Bill 67, which would have provided spousal benefits, adoption rights and providing more clout in preventing discrimination due to sexual orientation, has spurred us more

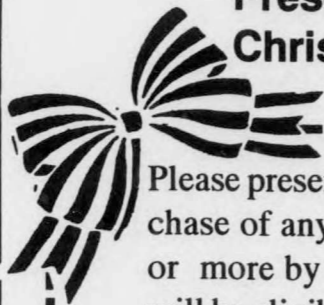
than ever to continue the fight for equal rights.

It's enough to know that we exist in a kind of perpetual social morass when it comes down to our rights. We need to address the issues of what we want from society, namely equal treatment from the Social Order. We are making some progress in this regard, but it's difficult to see that in light of blatant and subtle homophobia masquerading as some of our government, religious institutions, and other social agents. It's time to take a stand and not let other people tell us what we can and can't do with our lives. In one sense, the defeat of Bill 67 has sparked a change in the various gay/lesbian/bisexual communities across Canada. Perhaps another equal rights revolution is stirring from its intermittent slumber? If you or your group want to find out more information on these issues, contact the Speaker's Bureau at 453-4985 and ask for Tristis. They provide gay, lesbian, and bisexual speakers for class and group discussions on the issues of conflicts/solutions between homosexuality/bisexuality and heterosexuality and the system.

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